

Time is a Collector

by

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For Jessica Constable

Dramatis personae:

H

P

Sharon Pent

Mr Gematria

Scene: Room, dingy, untidy. Kitchenette. Door stage left.

Time is a Collector

Act 1

(H stands with his back to the audience, digging the soil with a spoon in a plant pot with no plant. P sits on a sofa, slowly opening a letter.)

P: And that's what I'm talking about.

(Silence for a while.)

H: Ahem.

(More silence. P slowly takes a letter out of the envelope, and reads)

P: (uncomfortably, reading aloud from the letter) For the attention of The geographical centre ... beneath your floor ... we need to ...

(P looks over his shoulder and watches H for a while. He then turns back to the letter.)

P: Sincerely ...

(He stares, dazed, out to the audience, and lets the letter drop from his hand)

(The phone rings. Animated, H grabs it, answers)

H: 2992? (to P, covering the mouthpiece) It's Matthias Chowder – get the map! (back on the phone). Yes. Yes I'm right here.

(P spreads out a map on a table. Both stand over it, studying it intently. P points at a place on the map and looks at H.)

H: Pinpoint it!

(P points again at the map and looks at H questioningly).

H: No, no that could ... that could never be.

(P points to another bit of the map)

H: Quite when was this? No, that's never right.

(P makes a circling gesture with his hand, nodding imploringly at H)

H: So ... the broad expanse of the consignment? (disappointed) Oh.

(P resignedly, slowly resumes his place on the sofa)

H: I don't care if it's fallen down (he puts his hand over the mouthpiece, and says to P) It's fallen down.

P: Whatever.

H: (after a long pause) Good day. (he moves to put the phone down, then puts the receiver back to his ear).

H: Good day to you.

(He puts the phone down. P stands, goes over to the map, and with a lighter sets fire to it. Both silently watch it burn.)

P: Time to clean the guns.

H: No, it's not time to clean the guns.

P: Time to clean the guns.

(P sits again and takes out a revolver from a briefcase, and for a moment contemplates it)

H: Don't point that over here, and it's no way near time to clean the guns.

P: The barrel is my favourite bit. I can take it apart, smash it, glue it together again, and Bob's your uncle. Also the pin. The pin is the best bit. I can bend it, snap it, re-shape it; put it back as it was, right next to the barrel. The cock is good, the cock is good ...

H: Put the gun back into the briefcase.

P: ... I can melt it, squash it, then re-align it with some grease way back to the barrel and the pin. I keep the pin in the garden.

(H leans over P)

H: Put the gun back into the briefcase, and focus on the fact that now is never and that there never will be a now for guns and cleaning and you.

P: Now is never?

H: There never is a now, that's right.

P: What about a then?

H: There is no then as there is no now, there never was either.

P: There never was a then. I see. Not now never then. I don't think I agree, but there we are.
(puts gun back into briefcase)

H: Just keep it together – don't get uncommon.

P: Uncommon.

H: That's it.

(H returns to his activity with the plant pot)

P: Stop shifting soil.

(H carries on. A moment of silence)

P: Do you enjoy Bob Dylan?

H: I'm indifferent.

P: Do you know that song, 'April's Mantra'?

H: I said I'm indifferent, but I know enough to know he would never write a song called 'April's Mantra'

P: It's beautiful, really. It was never included on any album, and I don't think it was recorded or played live.

(Silence for a moment. Activities resumed. P picks up the letter again and reads).

P: Termination ... of space. (he throws the letter down again) How long are we meant to be stuck here? I'm getting itchy fingers.

H: As long as it takes to complete the job which was assigned to us yesterday.

(P gets up and paces)

P: Yes, well it seems someone close by here cocked it all up, made a grand mess of it all for everyone concerned.

H: It's complicated.

P: No, no (getting agitated): IT – FELL – DOWN. (P gestures at H by hitting his fist up against his downturned palm). Man!

H: Keep your voice low in this place! Look, KEEP – IT – REAL. Breathe into tonight. Focus on the next consignment.

P: Consignment!

H: Don't go apart on me.

P: Time to clean the guns.

H: Think of Morton Feldman. You like a bit of Morton?

P: It's alright.

H: It's more than alright. Think of the spaces between notes. That's what he's discussing. That's where you are.

P: Really?

H: Yes, think of tides of tides of silence.

P: What about the harmonics?

H: Yes, OK – it's not silence. Think of waves of overtones. You're there.

P: Where Morton is?

H: You're there.

P: Which notes?

H: It doesn't matter – just pick them; you're there, in between them, floating like I don't know what.

P: Is there a piano here?

H: Of course not. You going to give me a rendition of 'April's Mantra'?

P: Stuff you, man!

(P sits, agitated, but resigned)

H: (looks somewhere far distant, stage centre) The dark and narrow work.

(silence, then the very distant sound of the sea, for a bit.)

P: (stands). OK, let's hear a bit about you, and maybe about what happened back there.

H: You're always diffusing, aren't you?

P: Come on, we're here – what's it all about, then. Tell me about the racy shore you always bang on about. Beneath the star shot clouds – you know the one.

H: You want to hear about the Old Country?

P: To be sure.

H: A thousand years ago it was called the Old Country. Do you have any idea what that means?

P: It's an old bastard?

H: Aye. Let me sit and regale ye.

P: I wish you would, I really do.

(H sits and lights a pipe)

H: There is a road of endless light. It leads back to you.

P: To be completely sure.

H: Pass me an apple.

P: There aren't any.

H: As a lad, I used to run the racy shore. Behind me, a tunnock of hay stretching where eyes cannot go.

P: Beneath the star shot clouds?

H: No not yet. No that yet.

(H puffs on the pipe quite loud)

H: Old Jockey used to say: Never twixt nor tween, ne'er idle nor gestalt.

P: Gestalt.

H: Gestalt.

P: What nationality was he?

H: He was from the Old Country, obviously. Listen to me. Old Jockey used to sit on the side, and offer me bread and words such as the likes of you will never grasp. The likes of you can never comprehend even the beginning of Old Jockey. You, and people like you, would not hear – and I mean *hear* – his litanies ushered amongst the rushes-o.

P: Beneath the star shot clouds.

H: No, not the star shot clouds, I'm not there yet. Don't mess with me.

(More puffing on the pipe)

H: The road was less worn, but compass-right. Do you hear me? *Compass-right*.

P: Bless you.

H: And Lord, did the light beguile, like a minstrel in the twigs.

P: Praise be it.

H: And did the bee, in low places, usher in the paper tissue of dusk ...

P: Cherish it.

H: You and your ilk could never countenance the manner of wind which travelled from the far north.

P: Never. (P picks up a knife and a book and starts playing it like a bohran)

H: Nor could you people ever really *see* the neglected length of the owl ...

P: You hum it, I'll play it (P dances pseudo folk-like).

H: What are you doing?

P: Just keep it going.

H: Yes, well ... and the apples were like hives of Chisholm. People like you wouldn't know the difference between an ear of wheat and a zephyr shorn hare startled in the Old Country.

P: Magic.

(H puffs irritably on his pipe)

H: Look, this is not right.

P: Corn.

H: This is agitating.

H: (Suddenly standing, pointing the pipe at P) SIT DOWN WILL YOU!!

(P looks awkward, rattles the book, and slowly sits)

H: (facing audience) Have you ever woken in the ungodly night to see stars where they shouldn't be? Have you ever had any unusual muscular spasms?

P: Yes.

H: No, no you haven't – and I'm talking to out there.

P: Pardon me.

H: Or have you ever made apple crumble only to have it pointed out to you that you did not include butter? You are left with a pallid unacceptable, left with the taste of unco-operative apple and feathers and ashes. A pie without pastry.

P: You don't have to use butter.

H: You do in the real world, and I said I'm talking to out there. (back to audience) I implore you. I used to work for Duncan Mottey. In his factory. Have you ever known the terror of glimpsing a cake fly past the window? And what an unbearable sadness there is in that; I felt like throwing myself into the machines.

And there was a film constantly projected upon the foreman's forehead. Black and white, a grainy art house affair. I used to watch it while he spoke, ignoring the orders he barked out that were like wind from concrete. His hat was like a blue van driving far behind him.

I often worked in a room the size of a cupboard. I was shut in there by the foreman. I had to crush boxes all day, whilst a wind machine whipped up the bits and I would slip and fall into the cardboard. Fall falling fell – into cardboard.

It was early November when Duncan Mottey called me into the sub-office. "This company is results orientated," Duncan Mottey told me. "You don't belong here." I told him he didn't belong *there*. He shouted. There was an outcome.

(P picks up a toaster from the kitchenette area, and plugging it in, places it on the table. He shivers, is cold, and pushes the toaster bit down, and warms his hands over the subsequent heat.

He keeps repeating this action)

That night, a cake flew past my window. We must accept these things.

(H sits and joins P, warming his hands) The story of my life after this incident was terrible and wretched. And I wrote it down.

P: A confession.

H: A confessio d'el amito. And it became a best seller.

P: Eh?

H: And it became a best seller.

P: (stops it with the toaster) That's a new bit. When was this.

H: It took my whole life to write it. It took away my best years.

P: What was its title?

H: 'Light Cookery'

P: Publisher.

H: Bunker and Batter.

P: This is bull rubbish. You've spoilt it man, you've spoilt the telling.

H: No.

P: You're the one diffusing. I mean, you've told me nothing, NOTHING.

H: Have it your way.

P: I will have it my way. (stands, goes to the kitchenette - points emphatically at H): I WILL HAVE IT MY WAY.

(H goes back to the plant pot)

P: I mean, what breaks your heart? What mends it? What ticks it?

H: How very BBC.

P: Men doing deals in toilets.

H: It's been observed.

P: Do you like Weather Report?

H: You asked about my heart: some have said it is a box of found shipwreck, containing soil, and no metal. Nothing shiny – just little pebbles powering dry leaves, flicking bits of hogweed stem to create a pointless cycle of reaction.

P: Like a ticking straw bale?

H: No nothing like that – nothing that big, obviously.

P: So, a box of antique garden memoria?

H: You don't understand me at all. Do you? At all.

P: Don't start that likes of you ilk thing ...

H: Not even close to understanding.

P: Time to clean the guns.

(P goes to sofa, sits and opens briefcase)

H: You know you're not going to clean the guns.

P: I've begun it.

H: It's just not time. Surrender to it.

P: To it?

H: To the Great Lethe. Put the cock away.

P: The cock is the best.

H: Perhaps, but it is not its time. Have a glass of wine.

P: There isn't any.

H: Surrender to the Lethe.

P: Surround to the Lethe.

H: Sur-ren-der.

(P puts the gun away)

P: I might get the keyboard out.

H: Whatever will amuse you throughout this time of waiting.

(phone rings. Both look at each other).

P: Answer.

H: I'm doing this.

P: You're not doing anything. It's time to answer.

(Both stay still)

P: Do I have to do everything here?

H: You don't do anything! Not anything!

(phone stops)

H: Well, maybe that's for the best.

P: It could have been the next consignment!

H: Use your head! It's just not due; it will be swinging from harbour to boat a thousand miles from here still.

P: The sea, a choppy slate darkness.

H: Over which the spectres of dead babies swoop.

P: As seagulls?

H: You're catching on.

(phone rings again. Brief pause. H answers. He listens. He puts the phone down)

H: Mr Gematria and Sharon Pent are to pay us a little visit.

(Both look out to audience, expressionless. P silently opens the briefcase to clean the guns)

Act 2

(H stands by the door, quite still, back against wall, looking expressionless out to audience. P is stood by sofa, holding a book open in one hand, apparently reading, stock still. A moment.)

There is a knock on the door. A short pause, neither H nor P move. Another knock. No movement. A voice behind the door exclaims “Goddam!” Another knock. H, expressionless, opens the door slowly. Once open, he is hidden behind the door. In steps Mr Gematria and Sharon Pent. Mr Gematria is wearing a big suede coat, and is a big man. He enters with his arms outstretched smiling broadly. Sharon Pent is dressed in 1940’s style clothing and hair. She is frowning.)

G: Boys, boys!

SP: Look at this place. Disgusting. (She picks up the letter read by P at beginning and reads) Meet me on the intersection where the lights are on and on... where time bends ... (she rolls her eyes and hands the paper to Mr Gematria)

G: What are you doing behind that door.

H: (from behind door) Waiting for you Mr Gematria.

G: Step out.

SP: And what’s this? (she gestures at P, still motionless. She walks round him) Bart? What’s going on here?

G: (places his hand on P’s shoulder) Relax.

P: Thank you Mr Gematria.

G: Sit here.

P: I’ll sit here (P sits on sofa).

G: Step out.

H: (steps out from the door) Thank you Mr Gematria, sir.

G: Find a seat.

H: There’s a seat over there.

G: Well, find it, touch it, bring it, sit it.

H: I register.

SP: (indicating to P's gun case) What's in the case Bart?

G: Stand up.

P: Can I help you with something Mr Gematria.

G: Mrs Pent here has just asked me what's in the case.

P: Which case, Mr Gematria?

G: The obvious one – the only one.

P: Is there a case here?

G: What's that?

P: A hinge?

G: Expand outwards.

H: A lid?

G: On the table.

P: It's a pencil strengthener Mr Gematria.

G: Next to the pencil strengthener – that, there.

P: That .. oh, that, there. You mean the black ... attaché ...

(Mr Gematria remains silent).

P: Well, Mr Gematria, it's like this ...

G: You can address Mrs Pent directly.

P: Of course. And Mrs Pent may I say how alive you look today. You have life in you, in your hair. It radiates from your eyes. I particularly like the fold of your clothing near your neck, just that, there ...

SP: Bart, what is this horse shit?

G: Listen cock, answer the original question.

P: Which was, Mr Gematria? ...

H: (putting his hand up) I know Mr Gematria - and Mrs Pent, of course. Mrs Pent originally asked you , Mr Gematria, what's in the case. I knew straight away that you, Mrs Pent, must be referring to that, there, since patently that is the object of reference, of referenda. If you will. I apologise for the slowness of my colleague, but his brain does not seem to make synaptical connections in the way yours or mine would ...

P: Now hang on ...

(SP wearily picks up the case and opens it)

SP: Oh. (She wearily shows the case to G)

G: Ha! (looks crazed, teeth gritting crazy smile. He slowly, deliberately takes the gun out of the case. He slowly goes up to P with gun, slowly grips P's collar and places gun against his head, twisting the barrel, looking ever more crazed and strained. P stays motionless. After this, G moves in slow and exaggerated motion towards H. He does the same thing. H stands motionless. SP just watches. G takes a stance holds gun with both hands and takes aim at H, and pretends the gun has gone off, making gun noise in slow motion. He does the same to P)

(G relaxes, laughs, casually throws gun into open case held by SP)

G: Boys, people talk to each other.

H: May I sit now, Mr Gematria?

G: Do so. Now, word up ...

P: Also myself, Mr Gematria?

G: (looks at P for a moment and considers) Yes, alright, do so also. Mrs Pent, would you consider taking a seat?

SP: Not near these two, no.

H: Mrs Pent, may I just assure you that myself and (H gestures and considers P for a moment) ... that myself is most propriety ... kind of based. Most collected in behaviour.

SP: Bart ...

P: What exactly are you saying? What's with this non-inclusivity of myself? Mrs Pent, let me take a moment here to put you at ease and offer you my seat.

SP: I'm standing. Bart, I'm in this freak show no longer than I have to be.

G: Understood babe, just bear with it.

H: It would be good if you could just bear with it babe ... (all look at H) that is, Mrs Pent, of course. 'Babe' is a term of respect in my family, a long pedigree of pure usage, which you would know and be glad of Mrs Pent if you had ever visited the Old Country ...

P: Not that again.

H: I would often call my grandmother 'babe' ... (SP gives him a hard stare) ... I mean, only when I was looking at her photograph, taken when she was in her twenties and exceedingly beautiful. She's dead, I've never seen her except in the photos.

P: Didn't you say you used to hear her singing on the moor outside your house, in the night, in the dark ...

H: Yes, but I'm not talking about that here ...

P: In the rain? ...

H: Not now ...

SP: Bart, pull me up a chair.

G: As you wish.

P: Oh, now this is a good sign. A good thing Mrs Pent, but please do sit on the sofa.

SP: So where will you sit, because you sure as hell won't be sitting next to me.

P: I'll sit on the chair which Mr Gematria is just fetching. Then. I'll just sit on that, there.

SP: So, you want me to sit on the sofa, and you will sit on this chair?

P: I think that's it Mrs Pent, I think you have it just about right. Excellent, really good.

SP: What exactly will be gained by us swaping seats?

G: Really, just don't pursue it ...

SP: No Bart, I really need to know.

P: Well, I just thought ... I mean ... that, there.

SP: Get up.

P: Yes.

SP: Sit here.

P: Yes.

H: Yes.

(SP sits on sofa, P on seat)

SP: Happy with this, are you?

P: I am happy Mrs Pent. Comfortable in your presence.

H: He's happy with things as they stand Mrs Pent. I've seen that expression on the front of his head before, and I think I can safely say that he is happy all round.

SP: Do you want to swap seats as well?

H: If you like Mrs Pent, of course. Of course Mrs Pent, of course.

SP: Get up then.

H: Surely, yes.

(They swap seats.)

H: Merci.

SP: Happy?

H: Oh yes, Mrs Pent. Happy to be here, at this hour with you here.

P: Sitting on that, there.

H: Yes, I just said so.

SP: Bart, let's get on with this now please, with a view to finishing as soon as possible.

G: I'll endeavour, believe me. See here lads, you know me of old. I once knew a man called Magpie. He crossed me over a few side projects. Let's just say he messed me, and a couple of oblong packets found their way under my feet. I had a word in both his ears, so to speak, and he ended up in Canberra. Do you know what they eat in Canberra? Something called 'Grits'. Do you know what that is? It is the leftovers of yesterday's mind. Do not try and be bold. Don't start messing me.

P: Never, Mr Gematria.

G: Just shut it for a moment, if you're capable of that.

H: Do you mean him? ...

G: ALRIGHT?

(Silence)

G: Answer me this: is it possible to devise and build something practical and yet have no awareness of its purpose?

P: I knew it – man! (to H) It was that back there ...

H: Yes, I know what he's referring to.

G: He? Am I the cat's brother?

SP: Get to the gist please Bart.

G: So you know, do you?

H: Yes, I built it with these hands Mr Gematria.

G: A structure for the consignment. For-the-con-sign-ment.

H: For the consignment, yes Mr Gematria.

P: Con-sign-ment.

G: (to P) You, what would you build that structure with?

P: Cork?

SP: Bart, where did you find these freaks?

G: I said it was for the consignment. Do you have any idea what I mean?

P: Rock, I'd build it out of rock.

H: Mr Gematria, it has to be out of sturdy materials. For the consignment.

G: To contain the consignment.

P: Man! I knew this would come back to us!

G: Oh, it's coming back alright. What happened to the structure?

H: The structure was ... it could only have been. It was, just *was*. Why should we put labels on it?

G: It fell down.

P: It fell down.

H: Yes, it fell down.

G: Why?

P: Why?

H: Why?

SP: I've never heard such horse's ass in my entire life. It fell down, you piece of wipe, because it was made from cardboard.

H: What ...

SP: Then left, according to your own cock-skewed geometrics, out in the rain!

P: Card ... BOARD?

G: Do you know what you've done to us?

P: Man, the crows are coming back to roost out of the Old Country ...

H: Now wait just here. You have to understand the whole process which did involve a laminate!

P: They're swooping down like black pikes!

SP: (suddenly drawing a knife and holding it to P's throat) SHUT YOUR FLAPS! YOU BLANK ASS!

G: Just don't use the knife babe, not now, not here ...

SP: YOU CANDIDATE FOR FLATTENERS!! (SP lowers knife, calming herself down)

H: Is everything alright here Mr Gematria, because I would like the opportunity to explain the process of the structure?

P: Whoa.

G: Explain the process? Is that OK with you Mrs Pent?

SP: Not bloody exactly.

G: (goes over to SP and speaks low) Look babe ...

SP: Bart, stop calling me that in front of them.

G: Just hang in there – and hang about. Don't hang away; don't hang away ...

H: Look, I need to set up to demonstrate. I really will explain everything. But in the meantime please both of you, honoured guests: drink! DRINK!

G: You have liquor?

H: (faffing about with paper and a table) It's all there in the cupboard.

P: Have you heard of 'Schmoon' Mr Gematria? It's moonshine from the Hebrides with an extra magic ingredient: seals menstrual blood scraped off the rocks by sailors. It will blow your mind out.

G: (looking in cupboard. One solitary jar). All you have is malted milk.

(SP laughs mirthlessly)

P: He needs to set up to demonstrate.

G: Mrs Pent, a drink of this stuff?

SP: I'm not stopping, eh?

G: So where's your kettle, and milk?

P: Oh, we just usually have it dry. Spoon it into cups. It's good.

G: Just water instead, Mrs Pent?

SP: Yes, yes, just water, thank you so much Bart.

P: Is there any cake there?

H: (worried for a moment) Cake?

(G pours water for himself and SP, and takes his seat.)

G: (pointing at H) It's in our hands, your time ...

P: It says that here ... (P picks up letter, holds it out)

G: No it doesn't.

P: I'll read it.

G: You read one word of that text and I'll reverse your face.

P: Do you own this building Mr Gematria?

SP: What do you think?

H: Ah, Mrs Pent, I'm interrupting myself now to say how much we love it when you talk. I can speak for all of us. When the breath you create from two immaculate lungs, the size of cups, forms via your chattering teeth and lights up your squirrel eyes to let us know you are living and functioning. That is how we know.

P: I was driving with Rod and I saw you from a distance, but I could tell. You were perched on the kerb and I said to Rod: that there, over there is Mrs Pent talking.

H: Is that right.

SP: Bart, I am a font of violence not patience.

G: I realise how hard this is.

SP: Tonight there will be two rockets going up two arses and then I am out of this racket retardant.

P: Eh?

G: (to H) Start talking now if you value your bones.

H: (brings a table to the front of stage) Now, I will demonstrate the structure using paper.

SP: Not too far from reality ...

H: In order to get the join right near the apex of – well, what shall we call it: a roof?

P: Aye.

H: I had to trample up the left side with a ladder, for as you know the slope loped way past feet level. I mean, I would have to be elongated beyond acceptable laws to reach the top whilst also footing the steps near the base.

P: I'm following this.

H: So, if we accept that this sheet of paper equals the ceiling, I had to find a way of angling the second slope. So I trampled up there with the ladder, stepped up but then to get to the faux chimney, I had to stand left then move down two steps. I was then able to fasten the joint at the single apex, like so.

P: I'm elevated.

H: Now, the problem as I saw it, was to enable the laws to fling out the back without using an old fashioned dove tail joint. So, this meant I had to step back up three steps, but this time to the right. I had no metal, remember. So this sheet of paper here represents the back where the edges meet, and where all those places we would once have had to have had pinned, were settled into each other because of natural accommodation.

P: There's whiskey in the jar-o.

H: Now then, with this paper I was able to –

(SP deliberately knocks over her cup of water).

H: To ... apply the background water toilet ...

(SP knocks over the toaster)

H: ... by the ceiling above my mind ...

(SP pushes the gun case of the table)

H: To eight planes of fastened apex I did move onwards ...

(SP loses it and turns over the table, hurls a chair, throws a vase at the wall. She picks up a cricket bat and starts smashing the chair she has hurled.)

H: Oh dear.

(G initially tries to reach out to SP, but gives up, resigned.)

G: Okay.

(SP carries on smashing with the cricket bat)

P: What a start.

(SP then stops, grabs the gun case and bounds to the door.)

P: (pointing at her) HEY!

(SP looks back into the room, then throws the bat into the middle of the room and exits)

(P moves to the door but G grabs his arm)

G: Look what you've caused!

(P grabs a glass from the table and smashes it over G's head. G falls, dazed)

H: What!?

(P rushes to the door, H grabs him)

H: *WHAT?!!*

P: The guns!

H (pointing at G): Too late now!! Bind him!!

Blackout

Act 3

(G sits at the table, tied to a chair. A table lamp is shining on his face. H and P are murmuring inaudible words to each other, and are agitated.)

G: Just what are you two twits saying?

(P goes up to G and repeats the inaudible murmuring. It is just inaudible murmuring)

G: What you two clowns are doing is just so absolutely wrong (he starts to laugh in disbelief). You must be very scared right now.

H: (to P) Over here! (they go to stage left)

G: Hatch a plan!

H: How do we minimise this?

P: This?

H: (in exaggerated movements gesticulates around G) THIS!

P: All things are solved by head breathing.

G: Boys, your ass is burn.

H: I sense the tectonic plates of the Old Country shift into vertical.

G: Toast.

H: We need to crack this one ...

P: I'm with you. Right here by your side. Man, we'll crack this one, I swear.

H: Why, WHY??

P: Why? What?

H (gesticulates): THIS!!!

P: You'll crack it.

H: (pointing at P, exasperated) Oh no ... no, no ... this is all your crafting.

P: I can't believe you used cardboard.

H: You've ruined us.

P: How?

H: (gesticulates) THIS!!

G: Boys, I'm having a fabulous time right now.

H: (pointing at G) Silence!!

P: Hey guy, that's Mr Gematria, you know, I don't think ...

H: And??

P: I'm just saying, be aware, that's all; I mean, that there ...

G: This is rich fodder.

H: You're telling me to be aware?

P: Well, you know, you've got to watch your words.

H: After what you've done?

P: What?

H: (gesticulates) THIS!!!

P: I know you: you'll find a way out. You've got it all down pat.

(H goes over to the plant pot, agitated, and digs)

G: You may think it's the heat of the city ... but the heat's coming from somewhere else, believe me. Are the back of your necks getting dirt and gritty?

H: Silence!! (H raises his hand to G)

P: (restrains H's hand) Look, maybe this isn't so bad?

H: What exactly?

P: (gestures extravagantly over G) THIS.

H: How is that possible?

P: Listen up. You know Mrs Pent took the guns.

H: Yes, I am aware of that.

P: And that I struck Mr Gematria with a pint glass.

H: I was in the room, yes.

P: And that now Mr Gematria is here tied to a chair.

H: I have eyes, yes.

(G laughs ominously at this)

H: So???

P: Well, I'm just summing up and it doesn't seem so bad to me.

H: Why. Why, why.

P: Two words: card board.

G: Boys, do you hear that?

(all pause. No sound. And then the very distant sound of the sea for a bit, as featured in act 1. All contemplate it for a bit)

G: The sweetest jazz.

P: I'm not too comfortable ...

G: You understand that?

H: (menacingly to G) I said can it!

P: Can what?

H: You know, put it in a can and silence it – you know, “can it”!!

P: Can what?

H: (gesticulates a stream of words coming out of G's mouth with his hand) THIS!!!

(to P, gesturing at table where Mr Gematria sits) Look, calmness, just like I told you. Sit. It all needs to be talked about.

P: I feel very calm.

H: Maybe that's your problem.

P: Oh, I have no problem buddy.

H: It seems to me you have a lot of problems at this moment, buddy guy.

P: Like what?

H: Don't make me gesticulate. Just sit.

P: Where?

H: There.

P: Here?

H: That, there.

(P goes to sit)

P: I once dreamed I was a night butcher before this.

H: Oh let's hear it – it's not as if we're pressed for time.

P: We used to carve up the night into bricks, and then put the bricks in a skip. When you cut a brick out, daylight would show through. Sometimes the night was not happy, that's why you sometimes get red light. We worked all through the night, and by morning it was daylight.

H: Then how and why did the night return, I wonder?

P: It grew. And if you just left it growing, it would just keep on going and we would all eventually drown. Technically drown. Yes, before this, I dreamed I was a night butcher.

H: Really.

(P picks up letter)

G: Read any of that and you'll rue it.

(The sea again)

P: What's going on.

H: (sits at table) We need focii.

P: Oh man ...

H: Listen to me now: it's all about distraction. In creating a false structure we allow the answers and the clarity to break through the cracks.

P: (takes a deep breath, calms himself) Apologies for absences.

H: Let's hear from the treasurer first.

P: Absent.

H: OK straight to points.

P: The first point on agenda is how do we minimise this.

H: Now, I played golf with Dom Chowder ...

P: Wicket or picket round?

H: Eighth hole.

P: He's upped the ante.

H: Yep, he sends his best wishes and mentioned chow down on the 14th.

P: I'll note that. At the Pomp Strand?

H: Hugh Butter's.

P: Connect.

H: So, situation minimise. Dom suggested we call Lettuce Side.

P: In hall management?

H: Register.

P: She's hard. She'd get results but there's always a price.

H: What do you mean?

P: Remember Nugget Romes in industry?

H: Attitude. Alternatives?

G: You jokers.

P: I need paper.

H: Take it.

(P picks up a pile of paper and shuffles it, puts it down)

H: Do we have a business plan?

P: (handing H the pile of paper) Staple this.

H: (staples paper and throws it a G) Read this.

P: Time for questions.

H: (gesturing at G) The subject?

P: (gesturing at G) The suspect.

(sea again)

G: You see, nothing is passing away as you're hoping.

P: I bless the winds down on planet Mars. Gonna take aeons to do the things we never ever had.

G: Don't you know she's going to come back?

H: (losing it, making extravagant fist and kicking gestures over and around G) Won't someone shut this infernal object of waste!!

P: (sitting on table close to G) My friend here is losing it. Do you want that on your brain?

G: He's lost. So are you.

H: He's trying to divide us! (to G) But I'll tell you something: a hard rain is coming!

G: Oh, to be sure.

(the sea)

P: No.

H: Just focus will you. We need malted milk.

P: Make some.

G: Dust for dust.

P: Do it!

H: It's in hand! (H goes over to plant pot, digs a little, then goes to 'make' the malted milk)

P: (to G) We're the hardest on the block. I could be your friend, but my partner over there is a receptor for bad tidings. You don't want to jar him in any way.

G: How attached are you to your body parts?

H: (from over by the sink) Silence!!

P: Cool it, man (feigns relaxed laughter). Me and he are jawing, as you would, on the block. Maybe we'll get somewhere, eh guy?

G: Time ... time is up.

P: Somewhere like: the keys to the consignment?

(G laughs)

H: (approaching with two cups of malted milk powder) What are you asking him that for? What possible use now?

P: Look, we get the keys and we split, by land, sea or tree. Trust me here!

G: There are no more consignments ... for you.

H: I don't want that kind of knowledge.

P: Look guy, it would elevate us on the block ... we would be messus Big ...

H: What's this block thing?

P: Hey, it's where I'm from.

H: Where you're from? The "block"?

P: Yeah, the block. It's real, it's all there is. None of your old country shite there ...

H: You were brought up in a Jacobean mansion and your father was a professor of philosophy.

P: There was still a block there, man.

H: A block of artifice under the lecturer's lens.

P: It was a grid man, a grid of hedges that went diagonal. Bounded by some stiles and shit.

H: The corner of a farm. And stop saying "man".

P: I hung out with heavy guys down there, learned my trade from the likes of Headbutthead.

G: You don't know Headbutthead.

P: Sure I know Headbutthead, he taught me how to clean the guns.

G: (enraged, trying to break from his bonds) YOU DON'T KNOW HEADBUTTHEAD!!

P: Whoa, crazy guy!

H: Ok, let me take over here. Just sit there with your milk.

G: With your powder.

P: Powder becomes liquid in the spring, guy ...

G: But it's your winter ...

H: Silence!!! Look, I'm not wasting any time here. You may think you're getting an easy ride from my partner, but I am a very different proposition. (H hits the table with his fist) Do you understand that, and this? (H grinds his fist a few centimetres away from G's face) You get that? (H picks up the stapled document and throws it across the room) Has that sunk in?

P: Ahem.

H: Now, what I'm asking for here is a name.

P: Rupert.

H: Just keep it zipped while I'm questioning our client.

G: Boys, names are just masks.

P: Ru – Pert.

H: The name of your supplier, of the consignments. Who am I working for? Who are you working for?

P: (picks up letter and reads) Where one meets at the plane, two are borne none ...

(the sea)

P: What is that ...

(G starts laughing)

H: Answer!! A name!!

P: Not good ...

H: Stop it!!!

(G still laughing)

H: Silence!! (H throws his powdered milk in G's face. G stops laughing, sea stops).

P: Aw, hey, that's not right. (P brushes off the powder from G's face, wipes his hands on G's suit) (To H) Stay back please. Back over on the other side. (to G) Let me tell you something crucial, of the time after I was brought up on the block.

H: Headblockhead.

P: That was when the block done gone and finished with me. After I learned how to clean the guns. That was Headbutthead.

G: (straining against his bonds) NEVER!!

P: Look bud, you have to learn to relax in vacuum ...

G: YOU NEVER KNEW HIM!!

H: Silence!!

P: ... while I tell you about my life.

G: YOU LYING FILTH!!

(P throws his cup of 'milk' over G. G is silenced)

P: Drastic measures guy, for a drastic day.

H: I can't bear to think what the night will bring, no?

P: After I left the block, I found myself stuck in the jungle with characters. We had been sent on a mission to board. Have you ever seen the jungle at night? It looks like hair on a hill. And we got rained on. We never made it through the jungle. I never got to see again the sun rise in my cat's eyes. Can you imagine what that did to me?

H: Imagine a bottle, a cork, a knife and a fork – and you'll do right.

P: I'm telling you, I never adjusted! But do you know the worst of it? At night, under the trees, under a canopy rained on, you couldn't sleep for the howler monkey. It's a torturer, throughout the night, keeping you awake with its tactics ...

(the sea starts, very quietly, and gradually builds over the next few minutes)

P: Its rictus posturing, the vortex of its shrieking ...

H: A meaning within only known to its blank brain – but torture its device!

P: The howling of the howling monkey!

H: (perturbed by the sea) Keep thinking on that, it's better than this ...

P: But do you know what got us through? I bless his soul. A book received, sent from off,

wrapped in play paper. A book of verse, unexpected, by Headbutthead.

G: I WILL NOW KILL YOU!! (struggles, rages)

H: Silence now!!

G: YOU ARE FINISHED NOW!!

H: SILENT SILENCE!! (H pours the contents of the malted milk jar over G. G is stilled)

(P picks up the letter, goes to centre stage. G realises his bonds are undone, but he decides to sit for the moment. P slowly reads from the letter, as sea noise increases)

P: Regret to inform you: account cancelled.

(There is now a new sound woven into the sea – a shrieking, gradually increasing)

P: (reading with some difficulty) Terra autem erat inanis et vacua ...

H: (profoundly disturbed and slowly pointing at G) Silence ...

P: ... et tenebrae super faciem abyssi ...

G: (leaps from his chair and runs to the closed door) She's here!

P: ... et spiritus dei ferebatur super aquas.

(Shrieking and sea, which has reached very loud pitch, stops as P says 'aquas'. P and H turn to look at G, who is standing at the door grinning at them. He slowly turns to the door and opens it. As soon as door opens, the shrieking and sea suddenly begin louder than before. If any of the audience can see through the open door, all they will see is darkness. G's grin slowly disappears to be replaced by an expression of absolute horror. He slowly goes rigid, then falls back dead. Shrieking and sea continues until blackout.)

(H and P look at each other for a moment)

P: This would have been a perfect moment to clean the guns.

H: True, but now all we have are these hands ... buddy.

(They shake hands)

P: (indicating to the door) Let us now do this thing.

H: Register.

(They both leap over the sofa, over the chair, yelling, towards the open door)

Blackout

End

Richard Moulton, St Leonards 28/i/08